

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6503

INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 1245

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR RP MY

SUBJECT: MALAYSIAN VIEW OF SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES PROBLEM

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 1123

1. SUMMARY: FONMIN SEC GEN ZAITON SET FORTH TO AMB GOM VIEWS ON SOUTHERN PHILIPPINE SITUATION IN FOLLOWING TERMS: PROBLEM IS ESSENTIALLY INTERNAL AND MUST BE SOLVED BY GOP. GOM FAVORS PEACEFUL SOLUTION, IS NOT SUPPORTING REBELS NOR ENCOURAGING INDEPENDENT MOVEMENT. THERE IS CONSIDERABLE POPULAR CONCERN, PARTICULARLY IN SABAH, FOR PLIGHT OF FILIPINO MOSLEMS, AND SABAH CLAIM TENDS TO HEIGHTEN SABAH SUSPICIONS OF GOP. GOM IS NOT ATTEMPTING TO FORM ARAB BLOC AGAINST PHILIPPINES, BUT ON CONTRARY FAVORS ARAB HELP IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. GOM-GOP RELATIONS ARE GOOD, AND THERE HAVE BEEN NO DIRECT CHARGES OF MALAYSIAN COMPLICITY. ZAITON'S STATEMENT IS PROBABLY TRUTHFUL AS FAR AS IT GOES, BUT THERE WAS TACIT ADMISSION OF POSSIBLE

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PRIVATE ASSISTANCE WHICH FOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL REASONS GOM

WOULD BE UNWILLING TO TRY TO STOP. END SUMMARY

2. IN GENERAL DISCUSSION OF MALAYSIAN FOREIGN POLICY WITH FOREIGN OFFICE SEC GEN ZAITON, I ASKED FOR HIS VIEWS ON SITUATION IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES. I SAID THAT I HAD SEEN AP STORY OUT OF MANILA, APPARENTLY OFFICIALLY INSPIRED, ALLEGING OFFICIAL MALAYSIAN SUPPORT OF REBEL MOVEMENT, AND A REPORT FROM OUR AMBASSADOR IN MANILA ON BRIEFING GIVEN TO DIPLOMATIC CORPS, IN WHICH CHIEF MINISTER OF SABAH WAS MENTIONED BY NAME IN THIS CONNECTION. I SAID I WOULD BE INTERESTED IN HIS REACTION TO THESE ALLEGATIONS, PARTICULARLY AS THEY MIGHT AFFECT ASEAN COOPERATION.

3. ZAITON THEN LAUNCHED INTO EXTENDED DESCRIPTION OF GOM POSITION MAKING FOLLOWING MAJOR POINTS:

A. WE BOTH KNEW, HAVING SERVED IN THE PHILIPPINES, THAT MANILA'S PROBLEM WITH ITS MOSLEM CITIZENS IN MINDANAO AND SULA HAS DEEP ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ROOTS. IT HAS BEEN FOR DECADES AN AREA OF ENDEMIC VIOLENCE. MOSLEMS HAVE BEEN TRADITIONALLY OPPRESSED AND EXPLOITED AND HAVE NOT SHARED IN PHILIPPINE ECONOMIC GROWTH. HATRED AND MISTRUST HAVE DEVELOPED BETWEEN MOSLEM AND CHRISTIAN FILIPINOS, AND MARCOS IS FACING CONSEQUENCES OF DECADES OF NEGLECT. PROBLEM IS ESSENTIALLY INTERNAL, AND ONLY THE FILIPINOS THEMSELVES CAN SOLVE IT.

B. MALAYSIA HAS DENIED PREVIOUS ALLEGATIONS THAT TUN MUSTAPHA OR THE MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT WERE IN ANY WAY SUPPORTING THE ARMED ACTIVITIES OF PHILIPPINE MOSLEMS AGAINST THEIR GOVERNMENT. MALAYSIA WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE ISSUES SOLVED PEACEFULLY AND WOULD NOT, IN ITS OWN INTEREST, WANT TO ENCOURAGE AN INCREASE IN VIOLENCE. TROUBLE IN SULA IS DISRUPTIVE AND DISTURBING TO EAST MALAYSIA AND FOR BOTH DOMESTIC AND REGIONAL REASONS GOM WISHES TO SEE PEACE RESTORED. MALAYSIA HAS NO INTEREST WHATEVER IN ENCOURAGING AN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT.

C. MANY MALAYSIANS IN SABAH HAVE LONG ESTABLISHED PERSONAL AND FAMILY TIES WITH RESIDENTS OF SULU ARCHIPELAGO AND THERE IS CONSIDERABLE POPULAR SYMPATHY FOR THE PLIGHT OF MOSLEM FILIPINOS. CONTINUING GOP ADHERENCE TO SABAH CLAIM TENDS TO MAINTAIN IN EAST MALAYSIA GENERAL ATTITUDE OF SUSPICION AND ANTIPATHY
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TOWARDS THE PHILIPPINE GOVT AND THE JABIDA INCIDENT OF 1968 IS STILL REMEMBERED. THE RECENT INFLUX OF REFUGEES HAS FURTHER TENDED TO INTENSIFY EXISTING PUBLIC ATTITUDES.

D. IN WESTERN MALAYSIA AS WELL THERE IS INTEREST IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES AND PRESSURE FROM THE MOSLEM COMMUNITY FOR AN OFFICIAL REACTION WHEN, AS IN THE RECENT PAST, THERE ARE PRESS REPORTS OF EXTENSIVE FIGHTING AND MAJOR CASUALTIES THERE.

TUN RAZAK, ON THE EVE OF THE LAHORE CONFERENCE FELT OBLIGED TO CALL IN THE PHILIPPINE AMBASSADOR AND EXPRESS HIS CONCERN.

E. MOSLEM STATE INTEREST KEEPS USEFUL PRESSURE ON GOP TO DEAL WITH PROBLEM, BUT GOM HAS NO INTENTION OF ENCOURAGING ANY COLLECTIVE MOSLEM STATE SANCTIONS AGAINST THE PHILIPPINES. AT THE BENGHAZI MEETING MALAYSIA BACKED THE PHILIPPINES AND OPPOSED LIBYAN PUNITIVE PROPOSALS. AT LAHORE TUN RAZAK EMPHASIZED THIS WAS AN INTERNAL PHILIPPINE PROBLEM AND MALAYSIA HAS CONSISTENTLY TAKEN THE POSITION THAT MOSLEM FOREIGN MINISTERS SHOULD AWAIT THE REPORT OF THE SPECIAL MISSION THAT VISITED SULU LAST YEAR. GOM HAS ENCOURAGED SAUDI CONCEPT OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM ARAB COUNTRIES IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF MOSLEM AREAS OF PHILIPPINES, AND HAS OFFERED GOP ASSISTANCE IN LEGAL REFORMS THAT WOULD RECOGNIZE AND MAKE PROVISION FOR ISLAMIC REQUIREMENTS IN AREAS OF MARRIAGE, LAND TENURE, AND INHERITANCE.

F. THERE HAVE BEEN NO FORMAL OR OFFICIAL STATEMENTS FROM THE GOP ALLEGING MALAYSIAN OFFICIAL SUPPORT OF THE DISSIDENT MOVEMENT AND THE GOM DOES NOT INTEND TO LET PRESS LEAKS DAMAGE GOM-GOP RELATIONS. FOREIGN SECRETARY ROMULO APOLOGIZED TO THE MALAYSIAN AMBASSADOR FOR THE MENTION OF TUN MUSTAPHA'S NAME IN A MILITARY BRIEFING TO THE MANILA DIPLOMATIC CORPS. ROMULO EXPLAINED THAT THE BRIEFER MUST HAVE BEEN CARRIED AWAY BY HIS PERSONAL EMOTIONS.

G. ON SABAH CLAIM, ZAITON SAID GOM WAS NOT AT ALL CONCERNED THAT THE PHILIPPINES CONTINUED TO ADHERE TO IT. BOTH GOVERNMENTS HAD AGREED TO LET SLEEPING DOGS LIE AND WORK THROUGH ASEAN FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION. GOM HAD HOWEVER TAKEN THE POSITION THAT ABANDONING OF THE CLAIM WOULD IMPROVE PUBLIC ATTITUDES IN SABAH, AND THEREBY COULD CONTRIBUTE MARGINALLY TO GOP EFFORT TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM. MALAYSIA COULD NOT, HOWEVER, ACCEPT A
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LINKAGE THAT THE GOP SOUGHT TO ESTABLISH THAT IN RETURN FOR DROPPING THE CLAIM, THE GOM HAD THE CAPACITY TO BRING ABOUT A SOLU-

TION TO THE PROBLEM. TO ACCEPT THIS COROLLARY WOULD BE TACIT ADMISSION THAT MALAYSIA WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DIFFICULTIES. IT ALSO COULD BE USED BY THE PHILIPPINES TO REINSTITUTE THE CLAIM IF AFTER A PERIOD OF TIME A SOLUTION HAD NOT BEEN ACHIEVED.

4. COMMENT: ZAITON WAS RELAXED AND UNEMOTIONAL DURING THIS EXTENDED PRESENTATION. IT WAS ALL IN ALL, A HIGHLY PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATION, OF CLEAN HANDS AND GOOD INTENTIONS, AND AS FAR AS IT WENT, TRUTHFUL. ASEAN COOPERATION IS THE KEYSTONE OF MALAYSIAN FOREIGN POLICY. GOM HAS NOTHING TO GAIN AND MUCH TO LOSE FROM MISCHIEF MAKING IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES, AND INDEPENDENT

SULU STATE IS LAST THING IT WOULD LIKE TO SEE NEXT TO SABAH.
MALAYSIA'S COMMERCIAL INTERESTS WOULD ALSO BE SERVED BY RETURN
TO OLD PATTERNS OF PEACEFUL SMUGGLING. AT THE SAME TIME HIS
DESCRIPTION OF SABAH CONCERN AND SYMPATHY FOR CORELIGIONISTS
AND KINSMEN ON OTHER SIDE OF SULU SEA CARRIED CLEAR IMPLICATION
THAT SOME PEOPLE IN PRIVATE CAPACITY MIGHT BE PROVIDING TANGIBLE
EVIDENCE OF THEIR SYMPATHY, BUT THAT EVEN IF THEY WERE, IT NEITHER
ADDED SIGNIFICANTLY TO MANILA'S PROBLEM NOR TO THE ALREA
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